DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 159 716 CS 204 386

AUTHOR Stevenson, Robert L.
TITLE The New Newspaper Competition.
PUB DATE Aug 78
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (61st, Seattle, Washington, August 13-16, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Competition; Mass Media; *Media Research; *News Media; *Newspapers; State Surveys
IDENTIFIERS *Readership Analysis

ABSTRACT

Studies of newspaper reading in three communities in North Carolina were undertaken in light of the fact that newspaper reading has declined relative to population growth since World War II. In each instance, the respondents had available a relatively small local afternoon daily and a larger morning metropolitan daily. Results of the study showed that education of the respondent is the major factor in identifying readership: the more education, the more likely a person is to read the metropolitan daily or both dailies. Readership of both dailies in each area is highest in the 55 and over age group, with some trailing off among readers aged 65 to 70. People who are middle-aged and older are the most regular readers; those who use the metro daily or both available papers also use other news media, especially news magazines; and those who read primarily for locally oriented material are more frequently found in the category of local readers only, while those who read hard news and entertainment often choose the metro daily or both dailies. There is some evidence that people not planning to remain in the community or who are new to the community tend not to read the local daily. The data do not identify very clearly who is likely to read what newspaper, if any. (TJ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED159716

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

The New Newspaper Competition

Robert L. Stevenson

University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Robert L. Stevenson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

CS204386

Presented to the Newspaper Division, Association for Education in Journalism, meeting in Seattle WA, August, 1978.

The New Newspaper Competition

The relative decline of newspaper circulation in the United States since World War II is a curious phenomenon because it went on so long before the industry recognized the problem and because even now the reasons for it are so little understood.

The number of daily newspapers has remained fairly steady since the end of the war, but circulation for most of that period has continued to grow. In 1946, total daily newspaper circulation was 51 million copies; by 1973, it had increased to 63 million. But while that 22 percent increase in circulation was recorded, the population of the country increased 32 percent. From the early 1950s to the end of the '60s, the number of households increased by one-third, but newspaper circulation grew only by 20 percent. Newspaper circulation was clearly running forward but falling further behind the population of the country.[1]

It was not until total daily newspaper circulation leveled off and actually began to decline in 1974 that many industry leaders began looking for an explanation of this long-term trend and for remedies.

What happened to newspaper circulation? The easiest answer was the competition of television. The post-war generation, it was argued, had been raised with television and, as the Roper studies contended, more and more people were turning to the new electronic medium for information as well as for entertainment.

The claims of TV competition, however, do not stand up well. The Roper surveys, the latest of which claims that two-thirds of the American public gets most of its news from television,[2] are inconsistent with rigorous studies of actual media exposure (They are also ambiguous and confusing; the 1976 study also claimed that about half of the public gets most of its news from newspapers). A detailed diary audit of one day's activities reported by Robinson showed that

46% of the adult population in 1967 watched television news on diary day but 80% read at least some part of the newspaper.[3] A Gallup study for the American Newspaper Publishers Association produced similar findings. In that survey, 48% watched television news "yesterday" (where yesterday was a weekday) but 77% read a newspaper.[4]

In a paper to this convention last year, we reported our analysis of a detailed study to exposure to evening network television news over two one-week periods in 1974. That survey, based on data collected by W. R. Simmons and Associates, showed that over the 14-day survey period, almost half (49%) of the adult public did not watch a single network news program and only 25% watched more than four programs. The same data showed that for the period, 59% did not give their "full attention" to a single evening news program and 14% watched with full attention to more than four programs over the 14 days of the survey.[5]

A new industry study reports higher figures for television news exposure but shows, as do the studies cited above, that newspaper exposure is consistently higher than exposure to television news. In fact, cumulative exposure to newspapers over several days is still close to universal. The new industry study, for example, found that 84% of the adult population is reached by newspapers in a five-day week; over four consecutive Sundays, 80% see at least one Sunday edition.[6] The disparity between actual exposure to newspapers and television and the inferences that are drawn from the Roper data is so great that we have labeled it the "myth of television news."

Two factors, however, do emerge from these media use studies that provide insight into newspaper circulation declines and also hint at future problems.

The first is the relative lack of interest in news — either newspapers or television — by young people. The studies noted above consistently show a modest but positive correlation between newspaper and television news exposure

(and generally among exposure to all news media). The public typically uses both media or neither, not one or the other. And among those in the post-war baby boom who are now into or approaching the settling-down age of 30, exposure to any news medium is distressingly low. It is often assumed that media use increases with the increasing stability of youthful middle age, but this is more a hope than a certainty.

The second factor is the decline of the two-newspaper household. In the United States, daily newspaper household penetration declined from 1.24 to .99 in the years from 1950 to 1970.[7] In 1950, many households obviously were subscribing to more than one paper; by 1970, the level of penetration was down to an average of one copy per household, still enough to account for high levels of individual readership but far less in terms of total newspaper circulation.

Why is the two-newspaper household (or reader) now a one-newspaper household (or reader)? One reason is the increasing similarity of newspapers with the result that there is less reason to read more than one paper. Even in those cities with some newspaper choice remaining, the papers cover about the same events and offer pretty much the same features and more or less the same advertising. And, of course, newspaper competition is declining so that fewer and fewer readers have the opportunity to subscribe to more than one paper even if they wanted to. Or do they?

While the death of major metropolitan newspapers — particularly those with afternoon publication — continues, the remaining big-city dailies are expanding their circulation areas and, with varying degrees of effort and success, following their readers to the suburbs and beyond. There, they frequently run into existing dailies in small towns which are being overtaken with exurban sprawl and young dailies that have developed from former suburban weeklies. The choice of newspapers available to an increasing number of Americans

is home delivery of a regional metropolitan daily or a local daily, and the competition of the future may not be between metro giants but between large regional dailies and small, local dailies. An important question then, is which newspaper will readers choose and, more important to the industry's future, if it is possible to encourage readers to subscribe to both papers.

Method

Data pertinent to this question were collected in three surveys in North Carolina in 1977 and 1978.

Hickory, N.C. A survey sponsored by the American Newspaper Publishers Association was carried out in April, 1977, in and around the metropolitan area of Charlotte, N.C. Charlotte, about half way between Atlanta and Washington, is a major commercial center of the Southeast and has grown steadily from its 1970 census population figure of 241,000 to a 1977 estimate of 311,000. The Charlotte Observer, one of the best papers in the South, has high penetration in the metro area and surrounding counties. One of the outlying counties included in the ANPA survey was Catawba County, with a 1970 population of 91,000. The major city in the county is Hickory, population 21,000, with its own well-established daily, the Hickory Record, circulation 26,000.

The survey was a telephone interview with randomly selected adults that included a broad range of questions dealing with media use. The sample included 209 respondents in Catawba County.

High Point, N.C. In the early summer of 1977, a mail readership survey was carried out for the High Point Enterprise, an established daily of 30,000 circulation. High Point, population 64,000, is part of the Triad region of North Carolina which also includes Winston-Salem and Greensboro. The Greensboro News, circulation 77,000, is the third largest daily in the state and competes directly with the Enterprise.

The survey included only current subscribers to the Enterprise who were questioned in detail about readership of specific parts of the paper and about readership of other newspapers as well. The data base, of course, includes readers of only the Enterprise and readers of both High Point and Greensboro papers but not readers of only the metro newspaper and non-readers.

Goldsboro, N.C. The third survey was a telephone survey in early 1978 in Wayne County, N.C., by the Chamber of Commerce of Goldsboro, the major city, and Wayne Community College. The survey was part of a "Goals for Goldsboro" project and focused on current problems and planning but did include several questions on medi use.

Goldsboro, population 28,000, is half way between Raleigh, the state capital, and the Atlantic coast. It is a regional trading center with small industries and is the home of Seymour Johnson Air Force Base. The Raleigh News and Observer, circulation 126,000, is available via home delivery.

In all three cities, the local newspaper is published in the afternoon; all three metro dailies are morning papers.

In Goldsboro and Hickory, respondents were asked what newspaper(s) they read. Without attempting to distinguish frequency of readership, we categorized them as non-readers, readers of the local daily only, readers of the metro daily only, readers of both. In High Point, respondents were asked if they read any paper besides the Enterprise. On that basis, they were categorized as readers of the local daily only or readers of both it and the metro daily.

Results

The newspaper reading choices for people in these three widely separated areas of North Carolina are shown in Table 1. We have not shown the same demographic characteristics of respondents in all three areas because they are highly similar. Rather than describe the results of each survey in detail, we will concentrate on

general patterns across the three studies.

Demographics. Education obviously is the major factor in identifying the two-newspaper reader. In general, people with only a grade school education often read no newspaper, those with a high school education frequently are found in the category of local daily only, and those with at least some college typically read the metro daily or both papers. But these are crude generalizations, and the data vary widely.

Factors which are related to education, such as income and occupation, follow the same general patterns. Readership of both papers remains strong in the 55+ age group, although in the other data we find some tailing-off of readership of any paper after age 65 or 70. In general, however, the middle-aged and older continue to be newspapers' most regular readers.

Media Use. As other studies have shown, use of either the metro daily or both is positively related to use of other news media, particularly other print media. It is worth noting that the readers of a news magazine — the medium that may be the closest competition to the metro daily — is almost always a reader of both papers as well.

Readership Patterns. There is some evidence of readership differentiation between readers of competing dailies. Readers of locally oriented material — both news and ads — are usually more frequently found in the category of local paper readers only. Readers of both hard news and entertainment parts of the paper often choose the metro daily or both. There is no clear evidence that readers of both papers attend to one type of content in one paper and different content in the other. The High Point segmentation analysis is interesting because it suggests the importance of both traditional hard news and softer entertainment-oriented features for readers of both the local and metro dailies. The importance of the newspaper as entertainment, on the whole, seems to have been recognized

more by the country's major metropolitan dailies than by the traditionally oriented small dailies.

Lifestyle. Here we include a broad range of variables such as time spent outside of the home and length of time respondents have lived in the area. It is clear that time demands of work and other activities outside the home do not inhibit newspaper reading or the number of papers read. People choose and use papers independently of the competing demands of time and family.

An interesting finding that deserves more investigation is the relationship between newspaper use and length of time in the community. There is some evidence in the Goldsboro survey (where most newcomers are part of the Air Force) that new residents turn more to the regional daily and to new friends and neighbors than to the local daily. As length of residence increases, so does readership of the local daily, although use of the metro daily does not necessarily decrease. As the relatively low level of readership of the local daily among people who do not expect to be in Goldsboro in five years indicates, the local paper seems to be tied to some expectation of long-term residence.

Gratifications. A promising development in the study of media use is what is often called the "uses and gratifications" approach. Not a full theory of behavior, this broad assumption argues that behavior is in large part purposeful and a function of the psychological rewards that are derived from doing certain things and not doing others. In its application to media studies, uses and gratifications recognizes that mass media serve other purposes than the traditional responsibilities of civic participation and active public opinion formation.

There is some evidence here that readership of metro dailies or the combination of both papers is associated with information-related gratifications such as keeping up with the news. This is consistent with the finding that heavier newspaper use is associated with both high readership of public affairs and high

readership of human interest material which in many cases relates to public affairs topics as well. In contrast, there is some suggestion in these data that some of the non-information-related functions such as filling time and maintaining community ties are more related to use of the local daily.

Discussion

The intriguing finding of these three surveys is what the data do not show. In three quite different communities with different newspaper choices, we cannot identify very well at all the individual who is likely to read the local daily, the regional metropolitan daily, both papers or neither. This is true even when we consider a wide range of psychological, sociological and demographic traits closely related to media use.

Part of the problem — perhaps the most important part — is the lack of an adequate theoretical perspective for observing and explaining media use. After examining several studies commissioned by ANPA last year, Tipton concludes that the traditional emphasis on descriptive demographic analysis is

> intellectually sterile, at best predictive rather than explanatory, and frequently not very powerful even then. The News Research Center's 1977 projects demonstrate that almost any conceptual focus yields better statistical predictors of newspapers than isolated demographics.[8]

The efforts to go beyond demographics as independent variables and simple measures of readership as dependent variables are important and may be the key to developing more adequate theoretical explanations of media use. But the uses and gratifications approach assumes that people are capable of knowing the motivations of their behavior and describing them accurately. While we may know why we act in certain ways under some circumstances, media use seems to be a casual, routine part of our lives to which we give full attention and little thought. In our analysis of the full Charlotte area survey, we concluded that "use of all media seems to be largely a habit learned early in life — like party identification and brand

loyalty."[9] If so, we may be expecting too much of readers if we ask them to describe their motivations for media use in day-to-day life. And if media use is largely determined in childhood, we may also find that there are no short-term solutions to the problem of declining newspaper circulation.

An intriguing finding in the 1977 industry survey that supports this conclusion is the importance of use of newspapers early in life — either at home or in school — as a factor in whether people read papers regularly as adults.[10] Already in response to this, many industry leaders are renewing their interest in newspaper in education projects. If people read papers pretty much because they have always done it (or ignore them because they have never been readers), a major industry investment in readership promotion among young school children may be the best long-term answer to the long-range question of where the next generation of readers will come from.

Another important consideration is to capitalize on the frequent movement of people into most communities. One of the 1977 ANPA studies, a survey of new residents to Seattle, indicated a high information need among new residents.[11] The Goldsboro study suggests that local newspapers may not serve that need as well as the outside daily or people. A short-range tactic for newspapers to follow might include identification of new residents, followed by aggressive marketing of the paper during those crucial early weeks or even months of residence. Putting the newspaper on the newcomers' doorsteps for several weeks or months (rather than a single day or week at most) might help them settle into the community and at the same time begin to build up the routine newspaper habit that seems to be a major factor in readership.

Another factor we have not looked into is the kind of newspaper people read in the previous home. When people move from a rural area or small town, they might be more likely to select the local daily; if they are accustomed to a major metro

daily, they could be expected to pick that in their new location. The goal for both competing papers is to keep former subscribers of a similar product and to promote subscriptions among newscomers who may not be familiar with the special gratifications of a second, complementary paper. We are pursuing this line of inquiry in current studies as well as continuing our investigation into media use early in life and in the special situation of moving to a new community.

It is clear that media use is a subtle and complex behavior, and we cannot expect simple solutions to the complicated problem of faltering newspaper circulation. But it is clear that television is not the only competitor (or even the most important one) or that the culprit is not the absence of newspaper competition. Readers are still there (for the present at least), and competition is still there, too.

Table 1: Readership by Selected Individual Characteristics

Reads:	Neither	Local	Metro	Both
Hickory				
Education				
Grade school (29)	45%	24%	0%	31%
High school (124)	16	46	7	31
College (50)	16	14	4	66
Age				
Under 35 (72)	21	42	3	35
35-54 (77)	25	35	7	34
55+ (59)	14	29	7	51
Income				
Under ($10M (55)	27	35	2	36
$10-15M (46)	15	35	11	39
$15-20M (39)	10	33	8	49
$20M+ (23)	13	26	4	57
Sex				
Male (90)	20	33	6	41
Female (119)	20	38	5	37
Race				
Black (13)	39	46	0	15
White (194)	19	35	6	41
Reads news magazines (23)	0	17	4	78
Weekly viewing of network news				
0 days (34)	35	47	0	18
1-6 days (88)	22	35	5	39
7 days (87)	13	32	8	47
Weekly viewing of local TV news				
0 days (66)	27	38	2	33
1-6 days (70)	24	34	7	34
7 days (73)	10	36	7	48
Weekly listening to radio news				
0 days (54)	26	32	4	39
1-6 days (94)	19	34	6	40
7 days (61)	16	43	5	36
Regular readership of...				
Front page (162)	9	40	6	46
National news (104)	7	41	5	47
Editorial page (63)	6	32	3	59
Letters to editor (56)	9	30	5	55
Local news (147)	10	40	5	46

Table 1: Readership by Selected Individual Characteristics (Cont.)

Reads:	Neither	Local	Metro	Both
Sports (64)	6%	38%	5%	52%
Lifestyle (75)	9	33	1	51
Comics (55)	9	29	9	53
Classified ads (80)	9	45	4	43
Other ads (77)	7	46	4	44
Obits (110)	6	42	5	48
Dear Abby/Ann Landers (99)	9	39	6	46
Business news (54)	4	35	2	59
Use newspaper for...				
Keeping up with news (79)	10	38	5	54
Entertainment (39)	8	39	3	51
Passing time (23)	17	52	4	26
Keeping in touch with community (83)	6	43	4	47
Planning what to do each day (10)	10	50	10	30
Worked outside home yesterday (126)	17	40	6	37
Other time outside home (118)	16	41	3	40
Family size				
1 (28)	25	25	0	46
2 (68)	16	41	6	37
3 (48)	23	42	4	31
4+ (65)	20	31	6	43
Number of teens				
0 (159)	23	34	5	38
1 (31)	10	42	10	39
2+ (19)	16	42	0	42
Number of children 12 or under				
0 (150)	17	37	5	41
1 (37)	32	41	8	19
2+ (22)	18	23	0	59
<u>High Point</u>				
Above average interest in...				
Sports (340)**		53		47
Women's news (337)		55		45
Hard news (340)		46		54
Human interest (337)		44		56
Economics (338)		45		54
Culture-features (335)		60		40

Table 1: Readership by Selected Individual Characteristics (Cont.)

Reads:	Neither	Local	Metro	Both
Highest interest in...				
Sports (122)		64%		36%
Women's news (34)		71		29
Hard news (142)		44		56
Human interest (144)		44		56
Economics (132)		65		35
Culture-features (125)		58		42
Residence in High Point				
0-19 yrs (219)		59		41
20+ yrs (483)		53		47
Readership of Enterprise:				
0-19 yrs (283)		61		39
20+ yrs (424)		51		49
Goldsboro				
Source of local news...				
Newspaper (253)	15	62	4	19
Television (142)	9	44	6	41
Radio (67)	19	49	12	19
People (35)	37	49	8	11
Residence in Goldsboro...				
1-2 yrs (38)	13	55	16	16
3-4 yrs (30)	13	67	0	20
5-6 yrs (54)	19	48	4	30
Expect to live here in five years?				
Yes (261)	15	57	5	23
No, don't know (52)	21	58	10	10
Home				
Own (214)	14	55	7	25
Rent (86)	24	63	4	9

*Numbers in parentheses refer to number of respondents in each subgroup.
**Arbitrary names assigned to categories derived from factor analysis of specific news stories.

Notes

1. Don R. Pember, Mass Media in America, 2d ed., Chicago: SRA, 1977, p. 160.

2. Changing Public Attitudes Toward Television and Other Mass Media, 1959-1976, New York: Television Information Office, 1977.

3. John P. Robinson, How Americans Use Time: a Social-Psychological Analysis of Everyday Behavior, New York: Praeger, 1977, ch. 4.

4. George Gallup, "The Public Appraises the Newspaper," in Galen Rarick, ed., News Research for Better Newspapers, Vol. 7, Washington: American Newspaper Publishers Association, 1975.

5. Robert L. Stevenson and Kathryn P. White, "The Myth of Television News," presented to the Association for Education in Journalism, meeting in Madison WI, August, 1977.

6. Leo Bogart, "How the Public Gets Its News," Newspaper Readership Report Vol. 2. No. 1, January, 1978.

7. Gerald Alperstein, "New Statistical Probe Into the Decline of Daily Newspaper Household Penetration," presented to the Association for Education in Journalism, meeting in Madison WI, August, 1977.

8. Leonard Tipton, "Readership Research: Where We Should Go Next," (working draft for ANPA, 1978).

9. Robert L. Stevenson, "The Frequency of Newspaper Readership," ANPA News Research Report No. 7, Oct. 21, 1977.

10. "The Influence of Childhood Exposure to Newspapers on Adult Newspaper Habits," New York: Newspaper Advertising Bureau, Inc., 1978.

11. Keith R. Stamm, Kenneth M. Jackson and Lawrence Bowen, "Newspaper Use Among New Residents," ANPA News Research Report No. 6, Oct. 5, 1977.